

GOETHE AND VICTOR HUGO: A COMPARISON.

by Hon. Maurice Baring

I.

"NATURE," wrote Heine, "wishing to gaze on her reflection, created Goethe." It is not often that Nature can have had recourse to Germany in her introspective moods. For the gift of seeing things as they are is not essentially German. Indeed, as a rule, Germans are inclined in their account of the universe and its contents either to see too much or not enough. German critics, especially when they write about Shakespeare, are inclined to discover far-fetched meanings and hidden allegories in the simplest flights of fancy; and they are apt to pass a sentence of unqualified blame on the works in which they are unable to detect a lurking symbolism. For instance, they admire Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* for its philosophy rather than for its poetry. And in criticizing a poem such as Keats' *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, a German critic has been known to say that it contained no fundamental moral basis. One has only to read Mr. Nordau's criticisms of poetry in *Degeneration* to be convinced of the existence of this point of view. Mr. Nordau objects to there being seven stars round the head of Rossetti's "Blessed Damosel." "Why seven?" he asks. "We *are* seven," they would no doubt have answered. Now, many German critics would have written pages to point out the reason of there being *seven* stars round the head of the Blessed Damosel, and not eight or six.

A Frenchman, on the other hand, as a rule looks straight at the world, and tells us what he sees, often, perhaps, with less reserve than one might wish. Goethe and Victor Hugo vary somewhat from their respective countrymen in this respect. I do not mean to say that Goethe is not thoroughly a German, or that Victor Hugo is not 'French of the French.'

Let us abstain from the imperious condescension of telling another country that its most characteristic men of genius do not belong to it at all. Therefore, I refrain from saying that Goethe is either an Englishman, or practically an Englishman, or an Englishman in spirit, or an overrated discovery of the English, or that he is read at a greater advantage in an English translation.

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But in Goethe's genius, the clearness with which he saw things, his faculty of being a looking-glass to Nature, is not, I think, an essentially German characteristic. At least, if one quickly reviews in one's mind the most famous German authors, the last thing they suggest to us is a looking-glass. In the same way the chaotic and extravagant quality of Victor Hugo's imagination is not specially characteristic of the French genius. It is a thing far removed from the qualities of Racine, Lamartine, or Guy de Maupassant. And although Victor Hugo is, in a sense, an elemental poet, and renders admirably some of the larger as well as some of the more exquisite aspects of Nature, yet his whole genius is not one that reflects life with faithful accuracy. If Nature had any idea of making a looking-glass when she made Victor Hugo, it must have been to see what she did not look like.

The French christened Victor Hugo a romancist, whereas he rightly belongs to that class of writers whom they curiously enough christened realists, the class of Balzac and Zola—the class of artists who begin in glory with Michael Angelo and end in disgrace with Gustave Doré. The distinguishing sign of these artists is that they see things as they are not, or rather they see them in 'a glass darkly'—the glass of their own imagination. No woman quite resembles Michael Angelo's 'Night,' no man his 'David,' although, as an Italian poet has said, if the present race of men were exterminated that statue would remain "*Modello a Dio per un' altra stirpa umana.*" Balzac saw things through a sort of atmosphere of black coffee. People made the mistake of calling him a realist because the record of his visions are so terribly convincing. M. Zola appears to notice certain striking features of the landscape and crowds when they are very large; where there is one object he seems to see five hundred; he takes prodigious pains to tell us what he does see, to convince us that what he sees is true, and that he sees everything. From an artistic point of view he fails in the endeavour, since he chooses and lays stress on the unessential, and is entirely lacking in the sense of proportion. He has, however, the qualities of his defects in an extraordinary degree, and the result is that we obtain the impression of a vast and confused panorama, often overwhelmingly impressive in its background, but uninteresting in its foreground, which, as is the case in panoramas, is supplemented with real earth and strewed with lay figures stuffed with straw. Victor Hugo sees the universe through an enchanted mist. But he does not break down in the recording of his visions. For distinctness of effect and sureness of touch he might be compared to an etcher. His work might be put with Blake's illustrations to the Book of Job—often sublime, sometimes ridiculous, sometimes sublime and ridiculous, above all things imaginative.

II.

If a plebiscite were taken among cultivated people as to which was the greatest poet, Goethe or Victor Hugo, I think there can be no doubt that Goethe would come out at the top of the list by an overwhelming majority. On the other hand, if a plebiscite were to be taken among the same people as to whether, if starting for a desert island, they would take with them the works of Goethe or Victor Hugo, one can safely say that Victor Hugo would be victorious. The inference is that, although the name of Goethe is held in higher repute, the works of Victor Hugo are read with greater pleasure; or, at least, that a greater portion of Victor Hugo's works is read with pleasure than of the works of Goethe.

The question then arises, outside of Germany, how much of the bulk of Goethe's poetical work is known at all?

The cynical might answer Gounod's *Faust*.

Let us, however, take for granted that Goethe's *Faust* is as much read as it should be; besides *Faust*, what other poetical writings of Goethe are read?

Goethe's most important poetical work, after *Faust*, is generally considered to be *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, a play which is very much admired in Germany, and not without its English admirers; but it cannot be said that it is either a great play or a great poem, for as a play it is essentially undramatic, and as a poem it lacks vitality and inspiration, in spite of its dignity of style and of occasional felicitous phrases.

Hermann und Dorothea is a work loved by all true Germans. It is no doubt a charming idyll. But it is difficult for anyone who is not a German born and bred to understand how, except for the fact of its being written in hexameters, it can possibly be called poetry, or what it would have lost by being written in prose. The poetry of mortals may be their daily prose, as Mr. Meredith has said, but if a poet wishes to reveal this fact in an epic, the epic must strike one as being poetry; otherwise its existence is not justified.

After these, Goethe's most important poetical works consist of *Tasso*, *Egmont*, *Goetz von Berlichigen*, and the *Lyrical Poems*. The greatest admirer of Goethe would hardly say that if Goethe's reputation rested solely on *Tasso*, *Egmont*, and *Goetz*, that he would be considered more than one of the creditable German minor poets, such as Lenau or Körner.

There remain *Faust* and the *Lyrical Poems*. Now, the question arises, does *Faust*, together with Goethe's *Lyrical Poems*, entitle him to rank among the greatest poets, to be with Virgil and Dante and Shakespeare at an immeasurable distance from Victor Hugo, Heine, Leopardi, and Keats? My contention is that *Faust*, great poem as it is, does not quite achieve this, that the German genius

corresponding to Shakespeare, Virgil, and Dante, is Beethoven or Bach or Wagner, and not Goethe.

One can safely say that many people have read Goethe's *Faust*, and the fact that even after reading it they admire it, testifies to the merit of the work, as no book has such a glamour about it as *Faust*: the very name suggesting, as it does, all the fascinations of romance, magic, mystery, raises the highest expectations. These high expectations of admiration are fulfilled, but probably in an unexpected fashion. We do not get what we expected—I am speaking of English readers acquainted with German, and as yet unacquainted with *Faust*.

We probably expect, especially if we have read Marlowe's *Faustus*, the tale of an immortal soul bartered away for a life of ecstasy, and the tragedy of the thirst for all knowledge and the desire for all pleasure satisfied and yet insatiable. What we do get is merely a hint of this: the foundation of such a story, the premisses of the question. Let us first look at it from the point of view of the *Advocatus diaboli*.

Faust, saturated and sated with the jurisprudence, philosophy, and medicine, sells his soul to the devil in exchange for youth, on the condition that he shall experience so rapturous a moment that he shall wish it to linger for ever. He is resolved not to know, but to live. And he desires that as heaven 'has robbed him of immortal things, hell may this little moment mercifully give.' It is not until the end of the second part of *Faust* that the moment is granted, and then Faust's rapture takes the form of philanthropic enthusiasm. On this ground the devil is defrauded of Faust's soul, and loses the game, as he always does, and as is always the case when the clever vicious make bargains with the guileless. What we get is an episode: a love story simple and impure, of which the heroine is not Helen of Troy, but an ingenuous village maiden, stupid beyond her years.

Stated in plain words, the episode consists of a vulgar seduction; a *fait divers*; it is presented to us in a series of disjointed scenes which derive infinite charm and beauty from the character of Gretchen, a creation of exquisite simplicity, which the most bitter adversary must own at once puts Goethe in the same rank as George Eliot and George Sand.

The things Gretchen says contain "*de ces traits de nature que nous disons le comble de l'art quand l'art a le bonheur de les trouver.*" For simplicity and pathos they are beyond the range of praise, so that if Shakespeare had merely written the scenes where Ophelia appears, Goethe might fairly be placed on the same level as Shakespeare. But as soon as the episode ends with a case of child murder the poem is ended. The moral question of the play, as to

Faust's soul, is not solved at all. It is true that a solution is offered in the second part of *Faust*; but the second part of *Faust* is a totally different work, written some time after Goethe's intellectual faculties had begun to decay, and a long time after his poetical faculties had ceased to exist. It is universally admitted by Germans to be unintelligible; M. Emile Faguet, however, is fortunate in being able to enjoy it enormously.

Apart from the scenes where Gretchen appears, there are several fine speeches and some amusing scenes, several rather smart lines, and a quantity of popular platitudes neatly expressed. It may be objected that something has only to be well enough said for it to become a platitude in time. But the platitudes in *Faust* are not of that kind.

When Montaigne said that to say a man was a liar was to say that he was a 'brave man towards God and a coward towards man,' he said something which threw a new light on the subject, and the phrase will still strike every reader who comes across it for the first time as a sudden illumination; but when Mephistopheles says that in order that others should have confidence in you, you must have confidence in yourself, or that each individual can only learn what he can learn, we feel that we are listening to sentiments which must of necessity have been expressed since language was first heard.

It has sometimes been said that Goethe's Mephistopheles is a profound creation, and he has even been compared to Hamlet. But place him near Iago, and he seems to diminish; to be the same in kind and less in degree, whereas he should be greater in kind. His devilishness appears almost cheap beside the cynicism of Iago. One imagines that a being so refinedly corrupt might have found more amusing manifestations of vice than Auerbach's cellar and the dreary revels of the Walpurgisnacht!

Yet Mephistopheles is no doubt an exceedingly effective character in the play. He is a great and striking personality, impressive not so much on account of what he says as on account of what he is. In addition to this he strikes one as a witty and amusing man of experience and much *savoir-faire*, especially in his scenes with the school-boy. He is, in fact, an 'affable, familiar ghost'; but surely Mephistopheles should be something more than that. Goethe's Mephistopheles is a sceptic of this world, he is a part of Goethe himself; but is not the Prince of Darkness, and consequently not a gentleman. Compared with Marlowe's sad and terrible Mephistophilis he appears singularly shallow, and one blushes to think how inadequately he would have sustained a conversation with Milton's Satan.

To sum up for the devil's advocate, *Faust* can be attacked with

the very weapons of Germany. It has no consistent *moralische idee*, no fundamental idea running all through it. Assailed by the weapons of France it can be said that it has no artistic cohesion, that it is merely a collection of disjointed scenes, a rambling work defaced with glaring errors of taste.

Madame de Stael has said that it is ridiculous to suppose that Goethe was not aware of the faults of taste of which the play might be accused, but that it would be curious to know what motives he might have had in letting them stand, or rather in framing them at all. The theory that Goethe deliberately defaced his play with sins of taste certainly does not tally with all we know of his character; on the other hand, if he was conscious of these errors of taste and incapable of removing them, the fact points to artistic incompetency.

Let us now leave the devil's advocate and go over to the other side. Perhaps the element in *Faust* which has proved most fascinating, and evoked the greatest admiration, is its intellectual atmosphere. *Faust* is perhaps the most suggestive work ever written. It is saturated with a restless modernity. It is the poem, above all others, which reflects and expresses the intellectual *Anschaung* of the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century saw itself in *Faust* as in a looking-glass, and was thrilled to find itself so interesting. It had been craving to have its 'hopes and fears, beliefs and disbelieving' expressed. Byron attempted to do it, but got no farther than the outward apparatus and a melodramatic *mise-en-scène*.

But Goethe in writing *Faust* struck the exact note required. He gave full and perfect expression to the *état d'âme* of the nineteenth century. Whether this makes *Faust* a greater poem is questionable. Here, indeed, lies the difference between *Faust* and *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* expresses the moods of the nineteenth century as much as the moods of any century need expression. If *Faust* reflects more especially the character of one epoch, this is rather a defect than a quality; it means that *Faust* is for an age more than for all times. Emerson complains of this, and finds *Faust* too modern.

To be able to diagnose and reflect this 'strange disease of modern life' to be—and Matthew Arnold actually called Goethe 'the great physician of the age'—is no slight thing, but it brings Goethe not an inch nearer to Virgil, Dante, and Shakespeare.

On this side, therefore, we have the poetry of Gretchen and the suggestiveness of the ideas. It may be said, too, that the more one reads *Faust*, the more striking it appears, the more it grows upon one, till at last we regard and judge it not as a fabric of art, but as one of Nature's secluded haunts in forest, valley, mountain, or bay; barren and somewhat desolate; unimpressive at first sight,

devoid of obvious attractions, and yet a spot which, after a time, inspires the traveller who revisits it with a certain awe, and with a feeling of mystery, although nothing seems to be hidden; with a sense of harmony in its very incompleteness and ruggedness—which, in spite of manifestations of restlessness in tree, wave, or wind, is yet a *place of peace*.

Yet, in spite of its magnetic atmosphere, in spite of its beautiful passages, it cannot be said that *Faust* as an achievement is as great as the plays of Shakespeare or Sophocles, the poems of Virgil and of Dante; and nobody has ever dreamt of saying any such thing about Goethe's remaining works. Why then is Goethe ranked with Shakespeare and with Dante?

III.

If we put Goethe and Victor Hugo into the balance, and weigh them on their poetic merits they seem to complement one another.

At first sight we might be tempted to say that Victor Hugo was the very type of the bard, the Vates, the visionary, and Goethe the poet-artist, the *Poeta*.

But Victor Hugo was *Poeta* as much as *Vates*: he was a seer who made poetry; Goethe was a thinker who did the same.

Goethe certainly did not possess the muses' madness, without which, Plato tell us, no one may enter the temple of poets. His poetry, as Wordsworth said, is never inevitable; his lyrics are without the lyrical cry.

What is it, then, that we find in Goethe the poet? Why is he such a great poet? Why is he a poet at all? It is this: In certain passages of *Faust*, that is, in the scenes between Faust and Gretchen, and in a few of his lyrics, when Goethe not only thought but felt, his utterances reach that pitch of simplicity where style disappears and only perfection is left—that simplicity which is found in old Volkslieder and Sagas, or which may be the outcome of the most consummate art in the concealment of art.

In Goethe's case it is, of course, the outcome of art: a deliberate simplicity, a wistful note of brooding pensiveness, like the tone of a violoncello, that possesses indescribable charm.

We find it in such lines as these, in which Gretchen speaks to Faust:—

“Denkt ihr an mich ein Augenblickchen nur,
Ich werde Zeit genug an Euch zu denken haben,”

or

Sie hören nicht die folgenden Gesänge.
“Die Seelen, denen ich die ersten sang.”

We find it again in such lyrics as the *Wanderers Nachtlied*, *Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt, Meine Ruh' ist hin, Gefunden*, and in the harper's song in *Wilhelm Meister*, *Wer nie sein Brod mit*

Thränen ass, which must take a very high place among philosophical poems, as it contains in eight lines the whole philosophy of determinism. In poems such as these we meet, indeed, with 'thoughts that breathe,' and, perhaps, that is the most fitting description that we could give of Goethe's poems at their best.

These poems are, unfortunately, exceedingly few in number. There are at the outside a dozen lyrics of Goethe which reach this high level, whereas all the rest of his lyrical work stands at a great distance below this level, and consists of poems that are artificial, totally uninspired, and uninteresting. Here is an example which is to be found in all German anthologies:—

Willst du immer weiter schweifen ?

Sieh, das Gute liegt so nah.

Lerne nur das Glück ergreifen,

Denn das Glück ist immer da.

It is clear that this is a rhymed aphorism, and by no stretch of imagination could be called poetry.

Even in Mignon's beautiful and adventurous song we find a line such as :

"Es glänzt der Saal, es schimmert das Gemach,"

which is undoubtedly stiff and unpoetical, if not vulgar ; and Goethe's average lyrics are composed almost entirely of lines of this quality. In spite of this the notes of pathos in *Faust* and the few lyrical masterpieces form an amply sufficient claim for Goethe to take rank among the great poets, with Euripides, Leopardi, Keats, and Heine, but not assuredly a high enough claim for him to rank with the great fixed stars of the poetical Heaven, with Shakespeare, Dante, and Virgil.

The chief fault we find in Goethe's poetry is a want of poetical imagination. In all his works there is not a trace of the alchemic power of poetry that touches words and turns them into gold, into 'something rich and strange,' which fuses imagery, thought, and sound into a clear flame, so that the result is 'not a fourth sound, but a star.' This is not a quality that Germans admire very much ; and yet we find it in the finest poetry of other countries, in a line of Dante's such as :

"Nella faccia quale

Par tremolando mattutina stella."

or in Shakespeare's

"The multitudinous seas incarnadine."

or in Victor Hugo's

"Des avalanches d'or s'écroulaient dans l'azur."

Now, if we turn to Victor Hugo and examine his poetry, we shall find he possesses exactly those qualities which Goethe lacked, and thus complements him.

As I have already said, it is tempting to define Victor Hugo as the typical bard. It is probably in this character that he

appears to most of us; but the prophetic mantle of Victor Hugo is to his real genius as stage accessories are to a play of Shakespeare's. Divest him of the illusions he had as to his importance as a man of action and as a politician—illusions which were magnified and intensified by his prodigious imagination—and you have left an artist as conscious and as deliberate as Giotto drawing his circle or as Monsieur Joseph carving a wild duck.

But so far from his genius being diminished on this account, it is thereby doubly powerful, for not only was he gifted with the most frenzied inspiration, he had also the faculty of controlling it; he rode Pegasus when that animal was in its most undisciplined mood, with the most unrelenting of curbs and with the surest of hands.

I will quote one example of this double quality of imagination under direction:—

"Tout reposait dans Ur et dans Jérusalem;
Les astres émaillaient le ciel profond et sombre;
Le croissant fin et clair parmi ces fleurs de l'ombre
Brillait à l'occident, et Ruth se demandait,

Immobile, ouvrant l'œil à moitié sous ses voiles,
Quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été
Avait, en s'en allant, négligemment jeté
Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles."

Victor Hugo's poetic qualities are therefore first and foremost (what Goethe entirely lacked) poetical imagination, which he possessed in the very highest degree possible. No other poet of this century, except perhaps Coleridge, saw such visions, and presented them in such a definite form. His vision is equally penetrating as regards what he actually saw and what he imagined: and, as a carved crystal, his genius reflected every ray and colour of nature in the rainbows of its facets; again, as an echoing dome it vibrated and re-echoed to the sounds and voices of the universe. Nature plays on him, and at the same time he interprets Nature; so that he is less like a passive Æolian harp on which the winds play than the bow, to which Nature, as he says in one of his poems, is the harp:—

Goethe "La nature est la grande lyre,
Et le poète est l'archet divin."

He is the Wagner of poetry, in whose soul the mysterious voices of Nature reverberate, and he expresses the elemental secrets of sky and sea, of forest and fire, of dawn and the sunrise, of dusk and the stars, in a multitudinous orchestration in which each individual evolution is subordinated to and dominated by one ruling mind. Compared with this army of instruments, the poems of Goethe resemble the rare, deliberate melodies of an accomplished but unequal violinist, who at times achieves the utmost perfection in the richness and purity of his tone.

In addition to his imaginative power, Victor Hugo's two principal qualities are perhaps his unsurpassed lyrical faculty and his sense of pathos, of the *lachrimæ rerum*. He seldom thought, but he felt, and more generously than did Goethe; he experienced not only sadness and melancholy, but a profound and all-embracing pity for human beings, the rich pity of Virgil for mortal things.

As to his lyrical gift, he far surpasses Goethe in this province, since he has expressed a wider range of emotions, as deep in song, as musical in quality, and as perfect in form, in spite of the German language being probably better adapted to lyrical poetry than the French. Goethe's lyric lyre had but practically one string, the reflective; Victor Hugo's has a thousand; he 'wakes to ecstacy the living lyre.' First and foremost he strikes a note of passion which Goethe never knew. If Goethe has 'the thoughts that breathe,' then Victor Hugo has the 'words that burn,' 'the wonder and the wild desire,' in such lyrics as "Gastibelza," "Le Chasseur Noir," "Puisqu'ici bas toute âme."

The "Chanson d'Eviradnus" in *La Légende des Siècles* seems to possess every quality a true lyric is capable of possessing, and just as Victor Hugo could never have touched Goethe's grave note that sets in motion endless vibrations of thought, no more could Goethe have attained to the winged passion, the grace, the freshness, the delicacy, that are in this song, the prismatic splendour, the iridescent texture as of a dragon-fly or a nautilus shell, or of some fugitive being made of 'spirit, fire, and dew.'

Again, in a great many of his lyrics we find a childlike simplicity and tenderness of the kind we find in the poems of Catullus; here, as in the case of Michael Angelo, 'out of the strong comes forth sweetness.' The slight lyrics of Hugo have the intangible charm of a spray of surf or of a thread of dew-drops, and they are as distinct and delicate in outline as a crocus. Cases in point are the poem which begins "Elle était pale, mais pourtant rose," and nearly all the lyrics in *Les Contemplations*.

As to Victor Hugo's second great gift, his sense of pathos, it is here, perhaps, that his true greatness lies: in his poems on children, on the poor, the suffering and sorrowful, the captive and the conquered, and all those who are desolate and oppressed. His poem on the death of his daughter, entitled *A Villequier*, is the natural language of grief, and the *Tristesse d'Olympio*, as in the English language Gray's *Elegy*, which is generally admitted by French critics to be one of the four greatest love poems in the French language, is the most perfect utterance of the sadness that hangs about the memory of happy times, the melancholy fragrance of 'rose leaves, when the rose is dead.'

To sum up, Goethe was a thinker; he always thought and

sometimes felt, and to the moments when he felt we owe the power and pathos of *Faust* and the few lyrical masterpieces; he cast his thoughts and feelings into verse, which at times reaches the level of perfect beauty. Victor Hugo was a wizard, who not only beheld ineffable visions and heard voices denied to mortals, but was endowed with all the craft and cunning of a Merlin, and was able to make his infinite dreams visible in concrete jewels or in impalpable shapes and textures as of fairy soap-bubbles. And just as Wagner can shatter our nerves with the tragedy of the fall of Valhalla, with the love and death of Tristan and Isolde, or entrance us with the rustic notes of a shepherd's pipe or the call of a horn in a wood, so can Victor Hugo distil his rapture or sorrow into a dew-drop of song as simple as a tear, or weave for us, as in *La Légende des Siècles*, out of the harmonies of wind and wave, out of the 'gloom of earthquake and eclipse,' phantasmagorias of light and sound, of cloud and flame. Like Shelley's Pan,

"He sang of the dancing stars,
He sang of the dædal earth."

Consequently, if the first qualities of poetry are imagination and music, as Mr. Swinburne contends—passion, emotion, and vision expressed in song,—the poet of *La Légende des Siècles*, *Les Châtiments*, and *Les Contemplations* must rank above the creator of *Faust*. On the other hand, if criticism of life, philosophy, and suggestiveness are the true important factors, then Goethe is immeasurably the greater poet. The question is whether it is the greater thing for a poet to have soared high into heavens of music and passion, or to have dived deep into the grey seas of reason: into these seas Victor Hugo never dived, and into those heavens Goethe certainly never soared.

IV.

In the creative work of both Goethe and Victor Hugo the chief fault is, perhaps, the same, although it is manifested in totally different ways—namely, a want of the sense of proportion. With Victor Hugo it took the effect of confusing the great with the grandiose, and the grandiose with the puerile; in fact, in frequent transitions from the sublime to the ridiculous. With Goethe it expressed itself in a want of concentration, a diffuseness, an incurable incompleteness. Goethe's work often resembles his own famous comparison about *Hamlet*. It is a tree planted in a flower-pot: the tree grows and the flower-pot is shattered.

Victor Hugo's want of proportion is like the genii of the *Arabian Nights*, found in a chest by a fisherman. It towers to the sky in an instant of time. It is a colossal, chaotic want of proportion which sometimes leads him to sheer absurdity. With a few altera-

tions and some judicious compression, *Les Misérables* would make an excellent harlequinade; but it would be impossible to represent the *Elective affinities* at the Christmas pantomime in any form whatsoever. This is, no doubt, a merit on the negative side. And it brings us to our final conclusion on the subject—namely, that Goethe was the greatest amateur who ever lived; gifted with the finest intelligence and an unlimited curiosity, he passed a long life in cultivating himself by experience, and thought, and literature. His works were his notes and comments on the way. He is not a craftsman consumed with the love of his craft; he is not, properly speaking, an artist at all, or at least, if he was an artist, it was in his life and not in his works. For his literary work was a means, not an end; and it fails to be artistic from the fact of its having so successfully contributed to that admirable work of art which was his life. What was his poetic achievement? To put it as briefly as possible, a metaphysical poem with touches of pathos and song; a few beautiful songs tinged with metaphysics. Poets say that he was as near being a poet as a man of science can be. Men of science say precisely the opposite—that for a poet he came near being one of them. Goethe is thus a striking example of the *ars longa vita brevis* adage.

“ The lyfe so short, the craft so long to learn,
The assaye so hard, so sharpe the conquering,”

says Chaucer.

And although Goethe lived to be eighty years of age, life was too short for him to learn the craft, the assay was too hard, the conquering was too sharp.

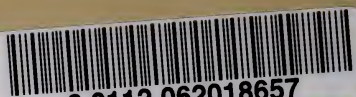
Even *Faust* is but a collection of the fragments written at different periods, suggested by various circumstances. This is no doubt the way to write interesting literature, but it is not the way to create masterpieces such as *Ædipus*, *Macbeth*, or *La Divina Commedia*. And it must be remembered that it is with Dante and Shakespeare that Goethe is usually placed.

Should it be asked, however, why, if Goethe's claims to supreme poetical fame are slender, his reputation as a poet is so great, the answer is not far to seek. Goethe is famous on account of what he *was*, as well as on account of what he wrote; and he was a great man, a force, a power; the dynamic personality of the man, his life, about which we know all, have made an impression on the century, so that the mind of the world bears the mark and impress of his personality in the same way as it bears the stamp of men of action, and politicians such as Robespierre and Gladstone.

Victor Hugo, on the other hand, although possessing nothing that can, properly speaking, be called intellect at all, that is to say if one were to judge solely by his political utterances, his general

conduct, and his works of criticism, was consumed by his art, inspired by it, caught up by it into a Heaven into which the luminous intellect of Goethe could not penetrate. Goethe is no doubt the more interesting mind, being the cleverest of men, although it is surely an exaggeration to call him the greatest of all critics. +

But I maintain that if a man be the greatest critic in the universe and the profoundest philosopher into the bargain, and if he chose to express his criticism and philosophy in poetry, his poetry must still be judged as poetry, and such a writer, even if his verse be of a high level, will still rank below a man, neither critic nor philosopher, who expresses his mere feelings in verse, which having no pretention to anything except beauty, is more inspired, more artistic, and more beautiful. Goethe was a *thinker*, but Victor Hugo did more than think, he *saw*. - (?)



MARS AS A WORLD.

DURING the early months of last year many astronomers directed their "optic-tubes" to the ruddy disc of Mars, which was then conspicuously visible in the midnight sky. The planet did not approach the earth so closely as it sometimes does in its periodical visitations, but it was high above the horizon, and therefore well situated for observation. Startling discoveries were scarcely expected, though eager eyes were strained in the effort to distinguish new and true markings on the Martian face. But it is, perhaps, just as well that no very novel characteristics were observed; for the absence of new information enables fuller consideration to be given to the facts already available. The present thus seems an appropriate time to make a general survey of the planet's features, and to describe some explanations of them which have recently attracted the attention of astronomers.

The first duty of a man of science is to observe accurately and with discrimination; the next, to interpret his contributions to knowledge. It is, however, much easier to develop keenness of perception than it is to find the cause of the phenomena presented. A good telescope, a clear atmosphere, and an acute observer, will add more to astronomical knowledge in an hour than can be explained in a lifetime; so facts accumulate far more rapidly than they can be read. Especially is this the case in celestial matters. For a long time the general features of the planet Mars have been known. A comparatively small telescope shows that more than half the surface is made up of extensive regions of a reddish-yellow tint, while the remainder consists of darker blue-green patches and two white "caps" around the poles. Arguing from analogy with the earth, the light and dark markings which constitute tenths of the area of Mars are held to represent land and water. But which is land and which is water cannot yet be definitely determined, though the general opinion is that the darker portions of the surface represent Martian oceans and the lighter areas land.

THE POLAR REGIONS.

The nature of the polar caps is known with a high degree of probability. As the summer advances in the northern hemisphere